

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships

Adopted November 5, 2003

The Connecticut State Board of Education recognizes that education is a shared responsibility throughout a student's life. Schools, families and communities all contribute to student success, and the best results come when all three work together. School-family-community partnerships are formed to support student success and help adults coordinate their efforts to promote learning. Students, too, play an important role in partnerships and must take responsibility for their own learning. Schools should take the lead in developing and sustaining effective partnerships, but to harness the power of all learning in a child's life, partnership activities must be implemented at home and in the community, as well as at school.

Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

Successful partnerships exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that create them. To be effective, they must recognize, respect and address families' diverse interests, needs, and talents, as well as economic and cultural differences. Partnerships must accommodate these differences by providing multiple opportunities for participation at various times and locations. From early childhood and preschool programs to before- and after-school settings, partnerships must be tailored to all stages and settings of a student's educational career. Most important, to succeed, partnerships must be flexible and based upon trust and mutual respect.

A Framework for Action

The State Board of Education believes school-family-community partnerships should address each of the following six standards:

1. *parenting* – promote and support parenting skills and the family's primary role in encouraging children's learning at every age and grade level;
2. *communicating* – promote ongoing, meaningful and effective communication among schools, families and the community about school programs and children's progress;
3. *volunteering* – provide appropriate training and involve families and community members in instructional and support areas both in and out of the school;
4. *learning at home* – involve families in learning activities at home and in the community, including interactive homework and other curriculum-linked enrichment activities;
5. *decision making* – provide opportunities for all families to develop and strengthen their leadership role in school decisions; and
6. *collaborating with the community* – enable schools and families to access resources from businesses, social service agencies and other groups, and serve as resources to the community.

(continued)

To be effective, any use of these standards should be focused on educational goals and designed to engage students and families in developing specific knowledge and skills. Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has greater effect on achievement than more general involvement.

Each member of a school-family-community partnership plays a unique and important role in contributing to success for all students.

A Role for Schools and Districts

To develop and sustain strong partnership programs, local schools and districts, with the involvement of parent and community leaders, must identify goals for school-family-community partnerships; develop structures for systematically implementing the six standards; monitor progress to learn which practices produce the best results; make school facilities available to the community and families; and build relationships with local businesses and community organizations that support educational goals. Most significant, school systems must provide training and support for teachers, administrators, other staff members and parents in developing partnership skills, especially around understanding and appreciating diversity and developing skills to work with people from different backgrounds.

A Role for Families

Families may take advantage of opportunities their school provides to become involved in activities related to the six standards cited above, or seek out other ways to contribute that meet their needs and interests. Most important, families make critical contributions to student achievement by providing a home environment conducive to lifelong learning, and by holding children to high but realistic expectations. Research finds that the way children spend their time at home has a stronger relationship to success in school than does family income level. Children tend to do better in school when families read to them, support homework completion, talk with them about school and help them plan their education programs. Programs that specifically engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.

Engaging in family literacy activities that create a literate home environment and stimulating parent-child interactions are particularly important. Family literacy involves making day-to-day routines that are the fabric of family life fun and productive learning opportunities. Family literacy takes many forms, including not only reading books but also talking, singing, writing or drawing, and reflects the family's ethnic, racial or cultural heritage. Family literacy includes adults expanding their own skills and knowledge, and viewing themselves and their children as a learning team.

A Role for Communities

Service organizations, religious groups, businesses and individuals can develop networks for communicating with schools and families about available support for education. Before- and after-school programs provide a particularly important opening for supporting schools and families. Community agencies can collaborate to provide integrated family support services that build upon existing community resources and link with public schools. Community members can serve as volunteers, role models and mentors, increasing individualized attention for students and demonstrating to both children and staff members that their community values education. Businesses can sponsor school-family-community partnership activities and encourage employees to play an active role in education.

(continued)

State Department of Education Leadership

The State Board of Education believes that the State Department of Education must provide leadership in developing and promoting school-family-community partnership programs that contribute to success for all students. This leadership includes supporting and integrating the standards for comprehensive school-family-community partnerships described above in all appropriate programs and fiscal policies that support student learning; promoting interagency relationships among state and local partners; and collecting and disseminating information about current research, best practice, and model policies and programs.

Benefits of High-Quality Partnership Programs

Well-planned partnerships between families, schools and communities result in greater student success. Students with involved parents, no matter their income or background, have higher grades and test scores, better attendance and higher rates of homework completion. They enroll in more challenging courses, have better social skills and behavior, and are more likely to graduate and go on to postsecondary education. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student's family is involved in his or her education.

Families and schools also benefit. Research shows that families often develop a greater sense of effectiveness, stronger social ties and a desire to continue their own education. Teachers report that their work is enhanced with help from families, and families who are more involved have more positive views of teachers. Increased involvement develops feelings of ownership, resulting in families being more supportive of school and community initiatives.

Of course, it takes more than engaged parents and communities to produce high student achievement. High-performing schools have a combination of characteristics, including effective school leadership; a clear and shared focus; high standards and expectations, and alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessments with those standards; focused professional development; and a supportive learning environment. Developing an effective program of school-family-community partnerships is not a magic bullet, but it is one of the critical supports students require to maximize their potential, and one essential step toward closing our state's achievement gaps.